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### Learn Functional Fitness From Ice Climber Manoah Ainuu

How this climber with his eyes on Everest finally blended total-body mobility with his mountain-ready muscle.







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"Functional" anything sounds boring—we get it. But in fitness, functional is one of the most exciting adjectives out there. It's a catchall word to describe the moves and exercises that prep your body for real-life activities. The pandemic forced people away from gyms and led to a surge in outdoor exercise. We quickly realized that our workouts hadn't exactly prepared us for wild environments. That extra muscle we'd built in the gym only weighed us down on trail runs and hikes. We rolled ankles and injured knees because we'd only trained on perfect gym surfaces and lacked the right combination of mobility and stability. The 72 degree

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Indoors in the gym, outdoors on the mountain, or even at home, contorting yourself to crawl under a bed to retrieve a toy, mobility matters. Not sure what "mobility" is? It's your joints' ability to be both flexible and stable at once—and it's a quality that allows you to stay strong no matter how you twist and turn. Without it, everything from catching a football to sitting cross-legged becomes a challenge.

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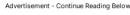
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Manoah Ainuu, 26, understands this struggle. A former football player, he took up climbing after moving to Bozeman, Montana. The sport agreed

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took up chinding after moving to bozeman, Montana. The sport agreed with his long, lanky frame. But at the start, he'd climb for days on end without loosening his wrists and ankles. He was soon battling elbow tendinitis.

Ainuu could muscle himself up a wall, but he'd wear himself out more quickly than his less muscular peers. Climbers often rely on a technique called "stemming," which has them splay their legs wide, essentially standing against the wall, giving their upper-body muscles a break. Ainuu could barely do this. "I would pretty much have to pull my groin and hips to get into the stemming position," he says.



His fix was a combination of rest and mobility training. Every three climbing days, he took one rest day. And a few times a week, he took a yoga class. Moves like downward dog loosened his hamstrings, and postures like the chair pose relaxed his calves and quads. Soon he could stem. "Being limber is definitely ideal when climbing," Ainuu says. Yes, oversized arms and legs help CrossFitters move big weight, but that muscle does little good during tasks like climbing, which requires you to move quickly, not just be strong. Ainuu arrived in Bozeman weighing 180 pounds; he's down to 160 now. "I didn't necessarily get weaker," he says. "But my endurance definitely went up."

That pound-for-pound strength will aid Ainuu in his next endeavor: In April, as part of the Full Circle Everest Expedition, he'll be one of ten climbers who hope to be the first all-Black team to summit Everest. To train for that, he's been pushing for even more lightweight strengthloading up a heavy backpack, hiking, and searching for new pitches to climb. His goal: gain strength without packing on too much excess muscle.



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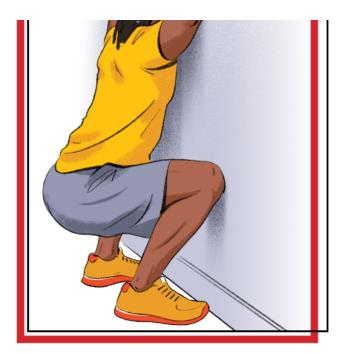
## MASTER MOBILITY LIKE AINUU

Battle the wall squat, which demands knee, ankle, and hip stability and flexibility. Stand facing a wall, feet slightly wider than shoulder width, toes a few inches from the wall. Place your palms against the wall, hands far apart. Squat down as low as possible, aiming to let your hamstrings touch your calves. Stand up. Try the move once a week, aiming to improve your performance each time.

### **Get an Edge**

The wall-facing squat challenges your spine's ability to arch, as well as your shoulder and hip mobility. To address your hips, do 1 minute of Spider-man lunges daily: Start in pushup position, shift your right foot to beside your right arm, then reach your right arm to the ceiling. Repeat on the other side. To improve shoulder and spine mobility, do 1 minute of Superman holds per day.





BEN MOUNSEY-WOOD



MICHAEL EASTER

Michael Easter is a health and fitness writer and a visiting lecturer at UNLV.

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